

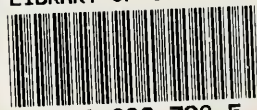
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AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED IN

NEWBURYPORT,

ON THE FORTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1821.

BY CALEB CUSHING.

[SECOND EDITION.]

NEWBURYPORT :

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE NEWBURYPORT HERALD,

BY E. W. ALLEN.

1821.

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1821

At a meeting of the Debating Club in Newburyport, held at their room Wednesday evening July 4, 1821:—

Voted, That the thanks of the Club be presented to Mr. CALEB CUSHING for his patriotic and elegant Oration, this day delivered before the citizens of Newburyport; and that Hon. William B. Banister, Mr. Whittingham Gilman and Hon. Ebenezer Moseley be a Committee to communicate the same, and request a copy for publication.

Attest,

HENRY JOHNSON, *Sec'y*.

Mr. CALEB CUSHING.

SIR,

WE herewith transmit you a copy of the vote of the Debating Club, in this town, of which you are a member, and in behalf of the Club, solicit your compliance with the request therein contained.

With respect. Sir,

your most Ob't Serv'ts

WILLIAM B. BANISTER,
WHITTINGHAM GILMAN,
EBENEZER MOSELEY.

Newburyport, July 5, 1821.

Hon. WM. B. BANISTER,
Mr. W. GILMAN,
Hon. EBENEZER MOSELEY.

GENTLEMEN,

Please to signify to the Debating Club my compliance with their request, as the readiest way in which I can express my gratitude for their favorable opinion of my oration; and be so good as to accept my acknowledgments for your own politeness.

With great respect,

I am,

Gentlemen

your most obedient servant,

C. CUSHING.

CAMBRIDGE, July 9th, 1821.

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AN ORATION, &c.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

IT has been customary, on this occasion, to discuss the political principles and display the superiority of our government, or to speak of the blessings which we enjoy in our common country, whose national birth the solemnities of the day are designed to commemorate. To depart from a course, which uninterrupted usage has now sanctioned, would savor of a presumption alike foreign to my feelings and unworthy of the audience that honors me with its presence. And the usage is built upon the soundest reasons. Nothing is more surely fitted to invigorate the spirit of patriotism in our breasts, than the return of an anniversary festival, which, like the present, may freshen our recollections of the persecution to which our forefathers were subjected in their native

land, of their escape from civil and ecclesiastical thralldom, and of the generous enthusiasm in the cause of religion, virtue, and freedom, which animated all their exertions and accomplished their final emancipation.

On such a day we do, we must feel elated, when we contemplate a flourishing people spread out over that region, where, but two hundred years ago, the savage was launching his canoe upon our then silent waters, or hunting his prey through the shades of one immense wilderness. Which among us but ought to exult, who reflects, that he dwells in the only free country on earth, and the only country over which the paralysing sway of military despotism is not stretched forth;—who reflects, that on this day America burst the shackles, which other nations are now striving in imitation of her to throw off, and rose up the free and the happy, the asylum of the unfortunate and the home of the brave? Certainly if at any time we have cause to be peculiarly impressed with the sentiment of our country's glory, it is now; and justly therefore may it be expected of every thing said on this occasion, that it should be devoted and consecrated to the memory of the revolution. But concerning a subject, which the most powerful minds have thoroughly investigated, and on which the most eloquent lips have spoken, it would be vain for me to think of offering any thing new to you, who have listened, on like occasions, to those who were the ornaments of our bar and our senate, and have had PARSONS, KING, JACKSON, ADAMS, for your companions and fellow-townsmen. I have therefore chosen for my topic the revolutionary convulsions, which are at the present time agitating the whole of Europe;—a topic,

which this day naturally suggests to our consideration, because on this day was the banner of constitutional liberty originally planted and unfurled in America, and its striped and starry ensigns flung abroad to float over our mountains, our forests, and our savannahs, and serve as the everlasting standard and rallying-point of independence.

If we compare the political institutions of Europe and America, we shall immediately perceive them to be essentially different. Our institutions grow out of a successful attempt to embody the doctrines of a rational and enlightened philosophy in governments, whose only foundation is the will of the people as declared and recorded in written constitutions. The political institutions of Europe on the contrary are feudal in their nature and origin, partaking, in a greater or less degree, of the rude character of the barbarous age in which they sprung up, and wholly depending for their support upon principles, to which long-continued sufferance rather than positive consent, or intrinsic right, has imparted authority. This difference it is, which accounts for the happy and peaceful condition of America, and the disturbances with which Europe is agitated. For the history of modern Europe is little else than a history of the struggles of mankind to disenthral themselves from the intolerable slavery of the feudal institutions. The crusades began the work of enfranchisement by consuming the riches and shaking the power of the military barons. The invention of printing and the revival of letters followed to scatter the seeds of improvement through all ranks of society. The discovery of the New World and of a passage to the In-

dies succeeding, enlarged the boundaries of commercial enterprize. Finally came the Reformation and gave free scope to the progress of enlightened views of government. As knowledge advanced, the cause of freedom continually went on gaining new strength, as the people divested themselves of one badge of servitude after another, until at last the American Revolution broke out and exhibited the first example of a people of European descent completely delivered from every relic of the feudal institutions.

In this age, therefore, the universal demand of the people of Europe is to have their freedom guaranteed to them by constitutions. Their demand is opposed only by those few in number, the kings, nobles, prelates and aristocracy, who, feeling their privileges to be incompatible with popular right, are anxious to stop the tide of innovation and reform, because they themselves must be the first to be swept away in its progress. But as well might they hope, with Xerxes, to chain the sea, as think their usurped immunities and empty titles can withstand the triumphant career of improvement. Religion has revealed that all men are descended from a common stock and destined to the same end, and she has commanded them to be free. The press, vainly as tyranny has endeavored to destroy its influence, the press has been proclaiming to them, with its thousand tongues, the sacred principles of justice and humanity. And if there be any upon whose heart religion has no hold, any whom the winged emissaries of the press have failed to reach,—nature herself has engraven and stamped upon their souls the charter of freedom, filling the veins

of the peasant with blood as pure as that which mantles in the brow of the noble, and maintaining their equality with a voice, which is irresistible, because the voice of nature is the voice of nature's God.

What expedient then shall the established governments of Europe employ to arrest the rapid advancement of liberal principles? Will they put their trust in the blind respect, with which mankind have been accustomed to regard superior birth? They might have done this in the dark ages, when the vassal was but little raised in estimation above the brute beasts in whose company he tilled the soil; but centuries are since gone by, and the oppressed and the oppressor have descended to the tomb together, where their remains are mouldering and corrupting into the same undistinguishable dust. So capricious and changeable is fortune that the very names of the haughty lords of other times are preserved only in the fugitive and decaying records of the historian, their race extinct, their titles transferred to the upstart courtier of yesterday, and their palaces become the banqueting-hall in which the posterity of their meanest slave may now be revelling as gaily and arrogantly as ever they did in the proudest moments of their glory.

But the progress and consequences of the French Revolution gave the finishing stroke to the extravagant claims of noble birth in Europe.—Who, that saw Lewis XVI. the centre of the most magnificent court, perhaps, in the world, could have imagined that the royal splendor he was invested with, like the brightness which lights up the eyes of the dying, was only the harbinger of his

overthrow, as in India the widow is arrayed in her richest nuptial garments to be prepared for immolation on the funeral pile, and that in a few years he would be insulted, dethroned, imprisoned and beheaded on the scaffold, amid the scoffs and derision of an exasperated populace? Yet such was the fate of this prince, in a country, too, where respect for rank was the highest, whose kings had long enjoyed despotic power, and been approached by their subjects with a submissiveness little short of adoration.—If you believe that royalty, after being thus trampled under foot by the very dregs of the people, can be purified from its degradation so that its ensigns should resume again their wonted holiness, follow the course of the revolution, and you will find all the distinctions of society uprooted before it, as the stateliest trees of the forest and the meanest weed it shelters are borne away together by the sweep of a mountain-torrent. When you see every family of exalted rank in France, the Bourbons, the Montmorencies, the Richelieus, all who could boast a line of distinguished ancestry, driven into banishment and spreading the tale of their downfall through the civilized world, if you can still doubt whether noble blood has lost any of that prescriptive veneration it had enjoyed for ages, what will you say, when you behold an obscure soldier of fortune, after subduing Italy, humbling Austria, and leading his victorious troops to the pyramids of Egypt and the cataracts of the Nile, finally mount without obstruction the vacant throne of the Capets, and plant his mailed heel upon the necks of the most high-descended kings in Europe?

Bloody and desolating as were these events, they proved beneficial in this, that they left behind them in the minds of the people a conviction of their own might. The monstrous ambition of Bonaparte had destroyed kingdoms and built them up again, annihilated ancient orders of nobility and created new ones to fill their place, made his brothers kings, and his fellow-soldiers princes, overturned the monarchy of Spain, extirpated the ancient aristocracy of Venice, reduced Switzerland, Prussia, Saxony, Poland, Italy and the Netherlands to vassalage, and only stopped in the career to universal empire when Europe and Asia conspired together to crush his gigantic strength on the field of Waterloo.

The recollection of these vicissitudes has imparted an impulse to the popular classes in Europe, which will never leave them until they possess a constitutional independence. And therefore the crowned heads of Europe, unable any longer to rely on the respect of men for defence, are compelled to call in the bayonets of domestic or foreign mercenaries 'to support an authority which heaven never gave by means which it never can sanction.' But it is well for us to know, what all experience testifies, that the prince who employs a standing army to enslave his subjects, must himself inevitably become the slave of his armies. And let England, if she will, ride down the people with her profligate dragoons;—let Austria march forth her half-civilized Hungarians and Poles to subjugate Italy;—let Russia summon her barbarian hordes of Scythians from utmost Asia to dissolve the cortes and annul the constitution of Spain: unless

they can imprison the soul as well as the body, and roll back the tide of improvement upon mankind a thousand years, their efforts to stifle the growth of freedom are vain and impotent.

Yes: vainly would European despots enlist for their safe-guard, every mercenary band which the influence of gold can league together: the spirit of improvement and freedom has gone forth among the people, and cannot be recalled from its glorious mission: the silent progress of knowledge is gradually, but irresistibly, undermining the sinking and crumbling fabric of arbitrary power, and fall it must, in spite of all the efforts of the servile and ambitious, who impiously endeavor to renovate its departed strength, when the voice of heaven has pronounced its overthrow.

Glance, for a moment, at the situation of Europe, and do you not find that every where the standard of reform is lifted up on high, as the brazen serpent was raised in the camp of the children of Israel, that whoever will gaze upon its glittering folds, and rally around it, shall be saved?—Hear you not the enthusiastic cry for liberty re-echoed from every hill and valley in Europe, rousing its inhabitants from the deep slumber of servitude like a thrilling and awakening trumpet-call?—Wherever you fix your eyes, are they not struck with signs of the gathering tempest, with indications of the earthquake coming to shake open the iron gates and hurl down the towering battlements of that vast prison-house, with which feudal tyranny has fondly thought to over-awe and keep in slavery the fairest regions upon earth?

England, France, Prussia, Germany, you perceive to be animated alike by the same revolutionary spirit, restless, eager to be free, and each demanding some one of the peculiar blessings of America, an equal representation, release from hated rulers, or a constitution.

* If you look at Turkey, you find the lustre of her crescent in the wane, and her enfeebled grasp relaxing its hold of those numerous conquests, which, after she had made them, she knew not how to keep but by reducing them to a desert. Wallachia and Moldavia have revolted from her wasting dominion, with a resolution worthy to have descended from that ancient Dacia, which so long baffled the victorious Roman eagles; and all Greece, by rising in arms against her infidel masters, seems about to show that she is inhabited by the posterity of those, who conquered at Marathon, and who died at Thermopylæ.

But the late condition of Spain and Portugal, and of Italy, is most peculiarly indicative of the contest between the advocates of the rights of man on the one side, and those of arbitrary power on the other, which is now convulsing Europe. We have seen the inhabitants of Spain, after slumbering under the stupefying influence of the priesthood until they had lost half of that chivalrous and noble character for which they had once been illustrious; we have seen them rise up from their deep abasement, and, in emulation of us, establish their liberties by a written charter constitution of civil government: whilst their colonies in South America were also contending with the metropolis for freedom, excited and sustained by the

example of our successful revolt from Great Britain. We have seen Portugal undergoing the same changes ; and in Spain, as well as Portugal, the royal armies themselves, the last and only reliance of despotism, coming forward as the first to undertake the glorious task of emancipating their country.

The contemplation of Spain and Portugal is animating to the cause of freedom ; but Italy, corrupted and enervated by luxury, desolated by the revengeful wars that France and Austria have been perpetually waging against each other in the heart of her richest provinces, broken down by ages of hopeless dependance, and, after a single faint and heartless attempt to regain her independence, garrisoned, as she now is, with the insolent troops of a foreign power, and over-run, as of old, with swarms of rapacious Goths and Vandals from the North,—is the time never to come when Italy shall be redeemed, when the music of her sky shall no longer waste its divine harmony on the servile, and when some appointed deliverer shall stand up on her soil with the eloquence of her Tully to rouse and unite his countrymen, and the soul of her first Brutus to lead them onward to fight the good fight of freedom and to conquer ?

The heart of the compassionate may, indeed, be wrung by the spectacle of wretchedness, of violence and bloodshed, which cannot but follow the efforts of the people of Europe to free themselves from slavery ; but shall we expect the good without the accompanying evil inseparable from that good ? The rain of heaven, as it descends to refresh the earth, may swell the gentle wa-

ter-fall into a cataract, and spread out the most tranquil river into a deluge; the same thunder, which purifies and renovates the sky, may also blast and destroy with its lightnings: but shall we not look to the issue, and when the storm has passed away, consider that, destructive as it may have been, it has left all nature serene, gay, fertilized, verdant, as on the first bright morning of creation?—Lament we may that a revolution cannot take place in Europe without violence; but we ought not for this reason to be content to have the dominion of ignorance and tyranny perpetual. We ourselves to this day, perhaps forever, should be groaning under the weight of the provincial government as in times past, if our brave ancestors had not dared the worst rather than continue slaves; if the immortal patriots of the revolution had not pledged their ‘lives, fortunes, and sacred honor’ to maintain the declaration of independence or to die in the attempt, and if they had not persisted in maintaining it through a long and bloody struggle with powerful foes.

But it is not by the progress of liberality that the flames of war are likely to be rekindled in Europe; it is rather by the flagitious ambition of those monarchs, who, unhappily for the human race, still retain power enough to entertain projects of personal aggrandizement. The emperor of Austria, solicitous to check the spread of intelligence in his benighted dominions,—the king of Prussia, anxious to stifle the love of freedom, which even his submissive subjects have imbibed,—the czar of the Russias, the humble and pacific member of the Massachusetts Peace Society, kindly professing to main-

tain his myriads and myriads of troops in arms to preserve the tranquillity of Europe, but in his heart meditating the subjugation of his neighbors and craving additions to the unwieldy bulk of his overgrown empire,—these military despots, for their profligate league, and they alone, will deserve all our execration for the evils which may ensue upon the endeavors of the friends of liberality to regenerate Europe. For this Unholy Alliance does not contend with France, it does not threaten Spain, it does not invade Naples or Piedmont, but it goes out to battle against the whole human race, and has proclaimed a crusade and a war of extermination upon freedom throughout the world. The struggle has ceased to be that of one nation combating another: now it is ignorance and prejudice arrayed against knowledge and reason, tyranny endeavoring to strangle the youthful genius of liberty in his cradle, darkness usurping the place of light, the host of hell marshalled in opposition to the bright and glorious armies of heaven. Of such a struggle we cannot doubt the issue. We feel that truth is mighty and will prevail. We know that liberal principles of government must grow up with the rapid and irresistible diffusion of improvement.

And what American is there, who does not long to see the constitutional and republican principles of the Federal Union universally disseminated, as the only method of giving a stable foundation to freedom, and delivering the civilized world from the horrors of war?—If the nations of Europe desire to have their soil cease to be watered with human blood, as it has continually been

from the earliest records of history down to the present hour; if they wish to have science and the arts with all the blessings of social life flourish, as they never yet have done, under the genial and auspicious influence of universal peace;—let them unite together, like the States of America, in a perpetual league of amity, which, leaving the rights of each particular nation unimpaired, shall have for its only ends the support of peace and the acceleration of public improvement. The great obstacle to the establishment of concord among nations is the want of any common superior to whom their differences may be referred for adjudication. While men were in a state of nature, previous to the formation of political society, the hand of every individual must have been turned against his fellows, because they had no resource for the adjustment of disputes, excepting violence. So it is now with respect to nations. And as the grandest invention ever yet bestowed upon the human race is that of political societies, so there is a grander still, which remains, and that is the institution of a federal union embracing within its ample jurisdiction all the civilized nations of the globe. Then, but not before, may we hope to see the hatchet buried beneath the olive-tree of peace, which, sending its roots broadly and deeply into the earth, shall stretch forth its branches to overshadow the universe.

MY FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THIS TOWN:

Much as I have already trespassed upon your indulgence, I am unwilling to suffer this opportunity to go by without adverting to the condition and prospects of Newburyport. The fate of nations is a theme more pretending than the fortunes of a single town: still may we not for a moment turn from contemplating the rise or overthrow of kingdoms to fix our attention upon the place, where the gay hours of childhood glided tranquilly away, and whither the delightful associations of home recall the heart in all its wanderings?

Admirably situated on the gentle declivity of the banks of the Merrimac, commanding a great extent of territory by means of that noble stream, inhabited by a frugal, industrious, enterprising and pious people, Newburyport rapidly grew up into a flourishing town during that happy period, when our country was at peace with all the world; and, with a fortune unexampled in the annals of commerce, freely enjoyed the carrying-trade of four continents. But, since those halcyon days of prosperity, maritime restrictions have come to embarrass our merchants; our most populous streets have been laid waste by the torch of the midnight incendiary; the business of the smaller towns has been absorbed by the increase of the capital; and every path, every avenue to wealth is become so crowded with eager competitors in every quarter of the globe, that they defeat their own efforts and mutually prevent success.

Although from the operation of these and other causes, which it is needless to recapitulate, the business and population of the town have declined since 1810, when our greatness had attained its height, we are not to conclude that the town is incapable of recovering its pristine strength. The fact is that previous to that time our rise had been rapid beyond parallel, and, when misfortune came upon us, it did not strip us, any more than our neighbors, of the means of future advancement; it only checked, if I may so speak, the rankness and luxuriance of our growth, and compelled us to rest content with the slow and ordinary, but unfailing, methods of acquiring opulence.

Misled by the striking contrast between the appearance of the town before and since the time of its greatest prosperity, have we not manifested too much readiness to indulge in discouraging reflections concerning our situation? We have been peculiarly unfortunate, it is true, in suffering so frequently and deeply by fires; but should we not soon redeem what has been lost, if commerce were restored to its ancient channels?—The external situation of the town is unrivalled in beauty; the sides of the river continually increase in populousness; the bar was no obstacle to the acquisition of wealth in former times, and therefore cannot be now; our mechanics are as faithful and intelligent as they used to be, when they gained so much celebrity for the ship-building and naval equipments of the river Merrimac; we can manage distilleries or fisheries with as much skill as our neighbors; we can purchase lumber as cheaply and ex-

port it in as good bottoms as can any part of the commonwealth; nor will our merchants or mariners yield to those of any other sea-port in uprightness, enterprise or information. If all these things are true,—and that they are so who can deny?—there is no reason whatever why we should feel more depressed, or think our future prospects more discouraging, than the rest of the maritime towns of equal size in New-England.

I suggest these considerations, trite as they are, because the custom is but too prevalent of emigrating from the town in consequence of a false idea that we are peculiarly affected by the existing state of commerce. Certainly if there is any thing whatever which has a tendency to impede the rise of the town, it is this most unfortunate impression; and to those who entertain it I would urge that they, and they alone, are creating the very evil of which they complain;—I would say that industry and activity are every where industry and activity;—I would entreat them, before they hastily bid adieu to the home of their fathers and the scene of their early domestic attachments, to consider whether, by uniting their efforts, they are not capable of rendering their native town as opulent, as its situation is beautiful and commanding.

Nor can I but believe that emigration from the town is injudicious, when I look around and perceive individuals, whom any town would be honored in numbering among its inhabitants, recently become our fellow-citizens. Let not ourselves be the last to be duly sensible of our advantages; let us rather strive, by all the means

in our power, whether of wealth, industry, learning, ingenuity, influence, or whatever other means we may possess,—let us strive to raise up and embellish the town, so that hereafter it may be said of us, as of the devout and patient sufferer of old, that after our afflictions God gave us twice as much as we had before. blessing our latter end more than our beginning.

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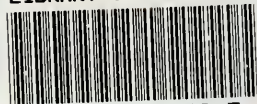
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